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Guest columnist

Free a killer? For 'information'?

RENO, Nev. — So now we learn that crowd of tosspots, turncoats, and troublemakers who called themselves "army intelligence" welcomed Klaus Barbie, the Butcher of Lyon, into their ranks after the war, because they "needed information."

Well, sure, don't we all?

Most of us in the information business recognize there are some limits. We don't kill for information — not usually.

I'm sure there are some moral theologians (or Hollywood screenwriters) who could come up with a scenario where the agent in place has to kill in order to save millions of other lives. But did we help a war criminal escape to Bolivia because he has information?

Maybe. Maybe the end does specify the means. The thoughtful person has to wonder: What end? What means?

I asked my 14-year-old son whether he felt our men should have been dealing with Barbie. He spoke his usual good common sense: "It depends on how important Barbie's information was."

We're not sure. It seems the U.S. Army was paying Barbie for his enemies' list. But this was the list of a man who had shipped thousands off to the death camps. Why were his enemies ours?

Communists? Please, give us a break.

Ever since the Palmer raids in 1919, when government agents were rounding up anyone who seemed to threaten the status quo, the men from "intelligence" have been asking the American people to justify every kind of felonious invasion in the name of security. There is every indication that some in the Reagan adminis-

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tration still believe in that.

I don't think we can stand much more of this. The Barbie case is history. But we can learn from it.

We can ask what our good guys were up to then so that, maybe, we can understand more what our current crop of good guys are doing.

I'm glad William French Smith is asking Army intelligence officers what they were doing on the Barbie case. Eugene Kolb, formerly of Army intelligence, is quoted as saying, "We didn't have any great pangs of conscience about helping Barbie."

Mr. Kolb, sir: Why not? What information was Barbie giving you and what did you do with it?